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CertiLingua® project documentation

CertiLingua Project Report
Renovation of a South African township kindergarten
XXX, 2009

„Certainly, travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living. “

Miriam Beard

I must admit that, before I put my feet on South African ground for the first time in my life, I had not seen deeper sense in these words spoken by a famous American writer. Well, it is to be mentioned right in the beginning that my family has never been of what is often called the ‘home sweet home’ kind of a family. Quite the contrary- during the very earliest phases of embryonic development already, I was taken to places all over Europe, as a result of my parents’ deep passion for travelling. Later on, it was becoming more and more obvious that these genes had been transferred to my body- I really enjoyed building huge fortresses out of the white, clean sand of Dutch beaches, let alone discovering stony paths in the wild forests of the Austrian Alps. It goes without saying that these experiences have had considerable impacts on my character’s development; but still, beaches and mountains can be found all over the globe and, therefore, might be regarded as unique to a rather limited extent only. So, there must be something else that eventually makes Miriam Beard’s words worthy of further consideration. This certain ‘something’ is not as easy to explain as the mere discovery of unknown landscape- owing

to the fact that the way of perceiving new things differs between all individuals, it is beyond my capacity to put it into a single verbal shape.

All I can say is that my personal kind of 'deep and permanent' change took place during my stay in the so-called Rainbow Nation of South Africa. This journey, however, was not that much of a travel in touristic terms- it took place as a part of an exchange program between the most southern country on the African continent and Germany. It basically consisted of two components; in winter 2006, a South African pupil came to visit my family and the following summer, then, I took a plane to the cape in order to visit him. That way, XXX XXX, a young white South African from Bethlehem (Free State Province) and me happened to become far more than just good friends.

((picture))

P1: Johann (on the right) and me during a one-week holiday in the Eastern Cape Province.

To put it a little poetically, XXX's eyes are widely open and he is well aware of the problems that his country is engulfed with. Our conversations made me aware of the fact that there are quite a lot of rather dark issues lying behind the Rainbow Nation's shiny curtain- and eventually inspired me to write an Extended Essay on the alarming tendencies of South African inner and foreign policies. This work ("*The Rainbow Nation: Is South Africa at risk of sharing Zimbabwe's decline?*") is attached to the present Project Report.

As far as I can judge, it is certainly one of my strengths that I'm very curious about what is happening around me. For this reason, I'm aware that poverty is not merely present in developing or emerging nations, but also right in front of my door in well-developed Germany. Still, when XXX took me for a ride across the township of Bohlokong, I could hardly trust my eyes: I had seen this dimension of misery on TV already, but getting face-to-face with it was indeed a very different and by far more shocking experience. I was overwhelmed and, at the same time, felt guilty – even though I'm certainly not extraordinarily rich in terms of European standards, I realized that my family must be incredibly wealthy compared to the average inhabitant of Bohlokong. Consequently, I knew that I would have the means to do something about the miserable situation there if only I managed to convince enough people to donate money for this cause. It went without saying that I would not be able to turn the whole township into a luxury district-

but by supporting small key elements of the people's lives, I could at least create a basis for further development. A good example was given by the father of my guest family who was engaged in a project which aimed to renovate the township's primary schools and kindergartens, small tin-roof shacks suffering from a severe lack of basic furniture such as tables and seats, let alone sanitations. "That way", he told me, "we can fight poverty right at its source." As the country's future is sitting in these institutions, this strategy seemed intelligible and effective.

((picture))

P2 shows me standing in one of the township kindergartens that were being renovated with the help of my guest father's initiative in 2007.

When I was back to Germany, though, I realized how difficult it would be to achieve noteworthy changes. For one thing, starting and coordinating such a project was made extremely difficult by the huge distance between Europe and the most southern nation of the African Continent. For another thing, even in times of internet and cell phones, communication turned out to be a weighty problem, too: hardly any owner of Bohlokong's kindergartens had access to the worldwide web. Additionally, intercontinental telephone calls are very expensive and, therefore, can be done only highly seldom. Due to these problems, I had almost given up my ambitions- when, one day in early summer 2008, my biology teacher told my IB course about her plans to let our school join the Global Issues Network- an international community of schools, aiming to increase public awareness of what challenges the world is confronted with. I totally supported this idea and so did three of my IB mates, so that a group of four pupils could be formed as a basis for further projects. Some days later then, our school became an official member of the GIN. This made all of us very happy and consequently gave ample space to future actions in order to increase the other pupils' awareness of global issues. So, quite rapidly, a question arose: What could we do in order to achieve that?

At this point, I remembered my dreams to support the renovation of kindergartens in South African Bohlokong and realized that, with the help of the group, I could manage to let them come true. Therefore, I prepared a Power Point presentation containing pictures I had taken in the township and presented it to my GIN mates, who were deeply impressed and touched by the bad living conditions in this shanty town. As it would be

beyond our possibilities to renovate all kindergartens there, we decided to work out plans to raise funds for at least one of these institutions in the area.

((picture))

P3: One of Bohlokong's central roads; not much more than a bumpy line across the dust.

But before we could do that, we first had to raise awareness of the problem among our school's pupils and their parents. Otherwise, they would hardly feel like donating money for an unknown cause- there are just too many development aid organizations asking for financial support. So, I decided to produce a film on Bohlokong during my next trip during the summer holidays of 2008. With the help of some South African friends, I arranged interviews with affected locals and managed to take impressive pictures of what life is like in the settlement. A special focus was put on a kindergarten called Khanya Creche which is heavily in need of money to persist in the future.

((picture))

P4: The 'Khanya Crèche' kindergarten, Bohlokong.

Additionally, I did some research on the township's past. All this data and information was, then, transferred to my computer where I put the pieces together and developed a film of about 25 minutes. This took me a lot of efforts: due to my personal pursue of perfection, I wanted every single detail to be presented at the best of my ability. Therefore, I chose suitable music, added German subtitles and integrated historical photos. It is not exaggerated to say that I spent about 30 hours just in the production of the film. During this time, it often was difficult for me to fall asleep, as problems occurred quite frequently. Therefore, I really appreciated the support of my IB mate and friend XXX. Whenever I was desperate, she stepped in and tried to find a solution; the voiceover, for instance, turned out to be problematic, as my voice was present at the interviews already. So, it seemed better to take another person's voice for the general explanations- XXX agreed to do this job.

It goes without saying that the two of us were indeed very happy when the film was finished. Some days later, the result was shown to the GIN group. As a next step, we wanted to present the film on the occasion of the XXX Fest, an annual celebration carried out by our school. In order to raise awareness of our project, we built a tin-roof shack in one of our class rooms and installed a beamer inside to show the film. Additionally, a box

was set up for funds. That way, we hoped to attract more people and, by the way, aimed to make them feel the conditions in Bohlokong's kindergartens. Unfortunately, only a few people were interested in watching the film- most of the visitors preferred to see stage plays by younger pupils in the nearby gym. This lack of interest made me very sad and almost made me dump the project: within one day, we collected nothing but 70 Euro. That was indeed a heavy setback.

((picture))

P5: Me, during the setup of my laptop and a friend's beamer inside our 'tin-roof shack'.

Still, I did not want to give up. Even though one 'mate' decided to leave the group, the remaining three of us as well as our teacher Ms XXX arranged another meeting and tried to come up with ideas on how to proceed. First of all, I told them about my recent phone call with the owner of the Khanya Creche, who had given me more concrete information on what exactly she was in need of most badly: sixty small chairs, twenty plastic tables, sixty small mattresses as well as building blocks, puzzles and playing toys. This would take us enormous financial efforts- and pose some logistical problems. XXX and I had booked flights already in order to assure that either the money or the required material would arrive at its destination. Supporting the crèche by giving them a mere cheque of money certainly would have been easiest, but in a country like South Africa, this had included a considerable risk. As the kindergarten's owner herself is quite poor, it could not be guaranteed that the money wouldn't be put into the renovation of her own domicile. This fear might seem exaggerated and based upon prejudices, but during my stays in the 'Rainbow Nation' I've witnessed comparable happenings far more than just once. Consequently, it seemed best to take the money to South Africa and to buy the material in local shops with the help of my former guest family. All this required a lot of preparation and several phone calls with my best South African friend XXX, who really appreciates our efforts and wants to support the project to the best of his ability.

But, first of all, more funds were to be raised. Therefore, Ms XXX came up with a very good idea: as one of my school's English teachers, she was involved in the planning of an "English Night" [for more information, please see my evaluation report on 'Stage Play-English Night'] and proposed that we could become a part of the programme, presenting the film and raising funds right afterwards. Due to the fact that the audience was expected to consist of about 300 guests, this seemed to be a perfect occasion to increase

our budget- and these expectations were met completely: the project gained a very positive feedback and we managed to collect more than 500 Euro for our cause. Additionally, several teachers declared themselves willing to donate money; only against receipt however, so that they could write their spending off against tax. That posed some problems, though. Since our project was not registered as an official foundation, we were not allowed to distribute such receipts. Consequently, XXX and I entered into negotiations with our school's booster club, aiming to start cooperation. The teachers could transfer their donations to this official association which, then, would remit it to my bank account. That way, these funds could be written off legally, to the pleasure of my school's teaching staff.

While I am writing these lines, we are still discussing the exact implementation of this money transfer; in case of a success, it might increase our budget by an estimated amount of 500 Euro. In addition, XXX and I presented the project to friends and relatives; for this 'direct promotion', we gained support by my father and my sister's boyfriend who, together, contributed almost 400 euro through raising awareness of the project among their colleagues and circles of friends. Adding the donations of several other people, the money we received on the occasion of the XXX Fest and the English Night as well as the estimated sum given by the teachers, this makes a total of about 1700 euro. This would be a great success as it would, according to my calculations, be sufficient to cover all elements of the list that the owner of the Khanya crèche had given to us.

As this evaluation report is getting towards its ending, it is time to draw a conclusion. To put it shortly and within one sentence: this project is by far the most ambitious challenge that I've ever dared to start in my life. It implies an enormous level of responsibility: several people donated more than 40 euro for our cause. It goes without saying that this confidence creates a certain pressure. Still, I am very optimistic that the project will be a success and that our effort will bear the fruit it deserves.

In other, concluding words: Travelling to South Africa did not only cause 'deep and permanent' changes within my personality. Despite all the difficulties that we had to cope with, helping the children of Bohlokong has meant a lot to me and I am very

grateful that I've been given the opportunity to change their living conditions at least a little for the better.

In sincere gratitude for the incredible support I was given by my group, my friends, my family and all these kind donators that contributed to the project,

Thank you.

